

PERFORMANCE!



The Newsletter of the Society of American Archivists' Performing Arts Roundtable

Issue for Summer 2007

[The Performing Arts Roundtable: Encourages the exchange of information on historical and contemporary documentation of music, dance, theater, motion pictures, and other performance media. (from the SAA Web site)]

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Message from the Roundtable Co-Chair

Thinking Ahead

By Helice Koffler

For some of us, it often feels as if the countdown to the next annual meeting, which will take place this year on Wednesday, August 29, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, began quite some time ago. This year we are particularly fortunate not only to have the SAA annual meeting take place in a city that possesses such a rich performing arts heritage as Chicago, but also to have the opportunity to hold our own Roundtable meeting in an offsite location--the Harold Washington Library Center of the Chicago Public Library. We hope to see many of you there at what is shaping up to be a very exciting program, focusing on Chicago's extraordinary dance legacy. Located on 400 South State Street, the Harold Washington Library Center is within walking distance or a short cab ride from the main conference site, the Fairmont Hotel. Please note that we will be ending our meeting a little early in order to allow those who wish to do so sufficient time to arrive back at the Fairmont for the next round of scheduled meetings.

The centerpiece of our meeting will be a presentation by Bob Sloane, Head of the Art Information Center at the Harold Washington Library Center. Mr. Sloane, who has been in charge of the dance collections at CPL for the past eighteen years, is also a strong advocate for the Chicago dance community (as well as a very accommodating and gracious host). His presentation, "Chicago Plays a Part in Dance History," will draw extensively on video and dance files in CPL's collections. The presentation will be followed by a tour of CPL's Chicago Dance Archives, Chicago Artists' Archive, and Chicago Blues Archive, and, if there is also time, a visit to the Chicago Theater Archive in the Special Collections Department.

Prior to the program and tour, we will be conducting our Roundtable business meeting. While my own term as co-chair concludes after this meeting, Adriana Cuervo will be continuing her term and we will appoint a new co-chair. It is our hope, however, that we also will be able to get even more people actively involved with the work of the Roundtable. To this end, both Adriana and I would like to make this portion of the meeting a forum to discuss how to move the Roundtable forward. Some of the ideas Adriana and I already have considered include: an expanded Web presence and the formation of a steering committee to work on session proposals and to carry out projects not necessarily related to the SAA conference itself. So, please bring your ideas to the meeting! This invitation to participate also is directed especially to those of you who are unable to attend this conference--you are still a valued and much-needed part of the Roundtable! I encourage you to get in touch with either Adriana or myself if you wish to serve, nominate a colleague, or if you have thoughts to share.

In closing, I would just like to thank the Roundtable for this opportunity to serve as your co-chair, an experience which has enabled me to connect with so many members and other groups and individuals with an interest in performing arts archives. Special thanks of course go to the

always upbeat Adriana, as well as to George Bain, for his dedication to keeping the newsletter going, and to Ashley Yandle for setting up and maintaining our current Web site. I look forward to seeing the Roundtable continue to evolve and grow in the coming years.

POSTSCRIPT on the Theatre Museum, London

I would like to thank all SAA PAR members for their interest and support during last year's struggle to keep the Theatre Museum open. Sadly, we closed in January 2007 despite healthy visitor numbers and a strong campaign led by the theatre industry and an army of supporters who liked what we did and believed we should continue to exist. However, the current situation is not entirely negative:

- The collections are intact and, for the first time ever, are now all stored together in a single location in Kensington Olympia, West London (nearest tube station: Olympia). They remain the responsibility of the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) of which we have always been a department. We are now referred to as V&A Theatre Collections (although I'm certain that the old name will also endure for years to come).
- We now have an improved and more extensive research facility in Olympia which is open 4 days per week, rather than 3 as before. Full details of our facilities and collections are available on our new website: www.vam.ac.uk/tco
- We are creating new permanent galleries for the performing arts at the V&A which are due to open in 2009. As soon as November 2007 we will mount our first exhibition there, dedicated to the work of British stage designers; and we are preparing a major exhibition on the Ballets Russes for 2010.
- We have just commenced a \$400,000 project to digitise 10,000 playbills and other items relating to East End entertainment, with a particular focus on Victorian music hall. Three other digital projects are also ongoing.

Claire Hudson

Head of Collections Management, Theatre Museum / V&A Theatre Collections

News Notes

SAA Performing Arts Roundtable to Meet on Wednesday, August 29

The SAA Performing Arts Roundtable will hold its annual meeting at the SAA conference in Chicago on Wednesday, August 29 beginning at 4:00 p.m. Note well: The meeting will take place at the Harold Washington Library Center of the Chicago Public Library, not at the Fairmont Hotel. For more detailed information, see the **Message from the Chair** above.

Pertinent Session at the SAA Conference in Chicago

Of particular interest for Performing Arts Roundtable members will be session number 402: “Preserving Your Audio and Video Assets: A Simple Physical Examination to Evaluate the Condition of Tape Materials in a Collection” by Peter Brothers of SPEC Bros., LLC. The session is scheduled for Thursday afternoon beginning at 4:45 p.m. Brothers will be able to provide more detailed information than in his brief presentation at last year’s Roundtable meeting. The Roundtable supported the session proposal for the SAA Program Committee.

Upcoming Workshop on Preserving Audiovisual Media

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) and PALINET are sponsoring a workshop “A Race Against Time: Preserving Our Audiovisual Media” at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio on October 24-25. The lead speaker will be Alan Lewis, Audiovisual Archives Consultant of Washington, DC. For more information visit the web site www.ccaha.org/workshop_cal.php or call 215.545.0613.

Reports from the Field

Editor’s Note: This section is intended to be an avenue for the exchange of information to members of the roundtable about collections or other topics of importance for archivists in or with the performing arts.

The report in this issue looks at collection development programs that were planned and implemented six-ten years ago. So what can this tell us today? That was then but this is now, right? But the Peabody Institute Archives’ efforts then to document the musical heritage of Maryland and to utilize well new technology have an important bearing on the repository’s operations today. The virtue of Elizabeth Schaaf’s article lies in showing how important this carry over remains years after the initial, heady activity of writing grants and starting the efforts. Enjoy the reading.

Sounds and Stories: Virtual Exhibits at the Peabody Institute

By Elizabeth Schaaf

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Peabody Archives. Since its founding, the Peabody Archives has served as Maryland's

premier performing arts archives. Its collections include the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, City Colored Symphony

Orchestra, Municipal Opera Company, Lyric Opera House, and the Baltimore Civic Opera and its successor, the Baltimore Opera. The Archives' holdings also include the personal papers of individual musicians who have contributed to the musical life of Maryland. The Archives currently holds a significant collection of documentation, including prints, photographs and memorabilia, related to the musical life of Maryland's African American communities www.peabody.jhu.edu/archives.

But the repository has not only built up an impressive list of collections. With support from the Maryland Humanities Council and the Maryland Historic Trust, the Archives has also developed an on-line resource to document the musical life of Maryland's African American communities: The *Sounds and Stories* website features oral history interviews with musicians who were part of Baltimore's music community in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

Returning to the Archives with his tape, one interviewer asked: "Do you ever stop falling in love with the person you've just interviewed?" Well, not yet.

During the 2001-2002 Academic Year, eighteen students from the school of Arts and Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University and the Peabody Conservatory took part in the Sounds and Stories oral history project. Students were trained in oral history techniques by John Spitzer, Ph.D., musicology faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Johns Hopkins University; Ron Walters, Ph.D., History Department of the Johns Hopkins University; and Elizabeth Schaaf, archivist and curator of the Archives of the Peabody Institute. Engineers from Peabody's

recording studio worked with interviewers to familiarize them with equipment and to assist with technical problems.

The Storm is Passing Over: Celebrating the Musical Life of Maryland's African-American Community From Emancipation to Civil Rights, an archival exhibit www.peabody.jhu.edu/archives/storm

that traveled throughout Maryland and the District of Columbia, laid the ground work for *Sounds and Stories*. The success of the project was due in large part to the tremendous involvement and participation on the part of those who we approached for interviews and others who simply heard about it from friends. With assistance from the Musicians' Association of Metropolitan Baltimore Local 40-543, and the extensive coverage of the world of music in the region found in the pages of *The Afro-American*, Baltimore's African American newspaper, Schaaf began compiling a listing of potential interviewees. The first interview for the project, with Camay Calloway Murphy, daughter of bandleader Cab Calloway, was recorded by Dr. Spitzer at the Eubie Blake Center as a demonstration for the interviewers.

Interviewers gathered supporting documentation - or borrowed it - from interviewees (photographs, newspaper clippings, programs, etc.) for reference and use on the website. Completed interviews were housed in the Archives after a copy was produced by a professional transcriber. Supporting materials were digitized for use on the website when appropriate. Returning to the Archives with his tape, one interviewer asked: "Do you ever stop falling in love with the person you've just interviewed?" Well, not yet.

In 2003 the Archives introduced *Sounds and Stories*, an on-line resource www.peabody.jhu.edu/sas to document the musical life of Maryland's African American communities in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Full oral history narratives with text, sound and images allow users to explore the important role Maryland's African American musicians played in the development of the nation's cultural history. On-line resources include photographs of musicians and musical organizations, scenes from Pennsylvania Avenue's golden years, biographical entries and links to other websites. Russ Moss, jazz musician, still photographer and senior cameraman for television station WJZ who was himself interviewed, volunteered to photograph participants in the project, coaxing them to perform in the process. Their portraits were featured in the *Sounds and Stories* preview exhibit at the Eubie Blake Center. The photographs were digitized, posted on the website and shown in an exhibit celebrating the *Sounds and Stories* website debut at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center.

The exhibit, hosted by Camay Murphy Calloway, drew a large and enthusiastic crowd. All of the participants in the project were invited to attend and used the occasion to share their stories and their music. One musician, veteran vaudevillian Alfred Prettyman, quipped, "I'm just delighted to know that there's someone out there who knows I'm still alive!" Montell Poulson, who played at the Royal Theatre, arrived from an earlier engagement. He told stories of his touring days with Fats Waller and Billie Holiday and acknowledged his mentor seated in the audience, bassist Charlie Harris, who played with Nat King Cole. Jazz lovers, children, grandchildren and reporters for print and broadcast media crowded together to listen as old-timers swapped

stories of years past and long lost fellow musicians. In the months that followed, training sessions for public school teachers were conducted to bring *Sounds and Stories* to students throughout the city and county.

The urgency of the need to capture these stories has been brought home by the deaths of so many of the interviewees since the project became a reality.

While music has been the focus of the project, the breadth and depth of the subjects encountered during the course of the recording sessions reach well beyond the realm of music. Users of the website can read and hear about East side gangs in 1940s Baltimore, an attempted infanticide in Annapolis, summer work in an Eastern Shore crab picking house, work on the mail trains that made their way up and down the Eastern Seaboard and the changes in daily life in Baltimore's African American neighborhoods from the 1930s to the present day.

The urgency of the need to capture these stories has been brought home by the deaths of so many of the interviewees since the project became a reality. Sadly, pianist Ellis Larkins, Roy McCoy, who toured with Lionel Hampton, Charles Harris, a member of the Nat King Cole Trio, and Tracy McCleary, the last conductor of the Royal Theatre, were among them but their stories are alive. The *Sounds and Stories* website is still in constant use by the public, scholars, the press and historians, including our own students, and teachers in public and private schools.

In a very real sense, *Sounds and Stories* became a true community project. The sheer numbers of people who have seen the website and the obvious sense of pride they

have taken in the project they helped to create is incredibly moving. Working on the project was a joy.

Elizabeth Schaaf schaaf@peabody.jhu.edu is archivist and curator in the Archives at the Peabody Institute, the center for musical training in the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

International Notes

We have another entry for this relatively new section of the newsletter. Claire Hudson of the Theatre Museum/Victoria and Albert Theatre Collections provides a brief yet informative article on SIBMAS, the International Association for Libraries and Museums of the Performing Arts.

Introducing SIBMAS

By Claire Hudson

SIBMAS is the International Association for Libraries and Museums of the Performing Arts (the acronym works in French, if not in English!) and I am currently its President, as well as being Head of Collections Management at the Theatre Museum in London. SIBMAS is a truly international organisation. Its Executive Committee, which recently met in Glasgow to plan our 2008 conference, currently comprises members from the US, Canada, Japan and Australia, as well as from nine European countries. Overall, our membership stands at around 200 worldwide, and includes a diverse range of organisations from the archives, library and museum sectors. Typically, members include national and regional libraries (e.g. the British Library, New York Public Library); universities with

strong performing arts collections (Texas, Bristol, Harvard); drama colleges; archivists from major dance, drama and opera companies (Paris Opera, Cirque du Soleil, Cameron Mackintosh); and theatre museums such as those in Vienna, Munich, Helsinki, Melbourne and London.

In terms of activities, the main focus is on the biennial conference. In 2006, we held our 51st conference, this time in Vienna. Previous host cities have included Barcelona, Rome, Paris, London and New York. Next year's will be in Glasgow, with Munich in 2010 and San Francisco in 2012. The conferences provide a wonderful opportunity for performing arts specialists to get together, share their knowledge and

experience, and sample a city's cultural and theatrical life.

For those who are unfamiliar with the formal use of the term 'intangible heritage' I should explain that the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage was adopted in October 2003 by UNESCO's General Conference, and entered into force in April 2006.

Our 2008 conference will be held at the Royal Scottish Academy for Music and Drama in Glasgow from August 25th to 29th. The title of the conference is *Capturing the Essence of Performance: The Challenge of Intangible Heritage*.

For those who are unfamiliar with the formal use of the term 'intangible heritage' I should explain that the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage was adopted in October 2003 by UNESCO's General Conference, and entered into force in April 2006. Although primarily aimed at preserving fragile traditions such as endangered languages, disappearing methods of craftsmanship, or recording 'Living Human Treasures', the convention is encouraging the discussion and development of methods for recording human activities and processes, as opposed to the objects and materials usually found in art galleries, museums and other heritage collections. Archive, library and museum professionals working with the performing arts subject area can clearly benefit from this initiative. We face a number of challenges not shared by colleagues in other fields:

- We deal with a constantly evolving product – is it ever possible to identify a definitive version of a stage production? For example, dance works tend to be reworked throughout their lifetimes; decorative schemes can be repeatedly adjusted or completely reworked. Researching the history of this evolution can sometimes require an archaeologist's skills.
- It is a subject area in which the process of creating a production is as of much if not of more interest to researchers than the end product itself. But how practicable is it to invade the artist's workshop or rehearsal process? The tensions between composer, choreographer, author, designer and performer can be complex. How can this relationship be reflected in the documentation of a production?
- Performance is a subject area which focuses on a physical activity, not on a static artefact. Representing that activity with static objects alone provides a partial record but not a wholly satisfactory one. Performance recordings, oral testimony and other techniques to reconstruct the experience of a performance can play a highly complementary role in supporting other types of documentation. Some methods are more effective than others.

Our 2008 conference programme will therefore focus on how effectively a live activity such as performance can be documented using a variety of both traditional and more innovative methods. We will be looking at audio-visual techniques, reminiscence work, reconstructions of performance and other methods aimed at capturing what is a highly ephemeral process. We will also invite

practitioners such as stage directors and designers, to talk about their work and how best to record it. Full details of the conference will be posted on the SIBMAS website very soon www.sibmas.org. If you would like to be included in mailouts from the conference organisers, please e-mail me with your contact details and you will be kept informed of developments.

Although the conference is presented over a 5-day programme, day tickets will be available for those wishing to attend for a shorter period. Delegates can also combine their trip with a visit to the Edinburgh Festival, only an hour away from Glasgow by train, or perhaps a holiday in the beautiful Scottish Highlands.

In addition to the conferences and the professional contacts they engender, SIBMAS members enjoy a range of other benefits, many of which are now made available online. Examples are the *International Directory of Performing Arts Collections* and the online information bulletin which SIBMAS jointly manages with the International Federation for Theatre Research, which alerts members to conferences, new publications and other news items. The SIBMAS website provides full programmes for past conferences and in many cases the full texts of the papers presented there. A discussion forum will also be launched for members later this year. Above all, SIBMAS provides a strong

professional network for our subject area, and the opportunity to share experience, to discover innovative projects being managed by peer organisations, and to enter into partnerships with them.

The tensions between composer, choreographer, author, designer and performer can be complex. How can this relationship be reflected in the documentation of a production?

The SAA Performing Arts Round Table and its members' interests are obviously of great interest to SIBMAS because we have so much in common. We already have active links with the Theatre Library Association (TLA) which have proved very productive. Our conference is open to all, and non-members usually make up at least 30 per cent of the delegates. Membership of SIBMAS will get you a reduced delegate rate – <http://www.sibmas.org/English/Joining.htm> for information about joining.

I would like to encourage readers of this article to come and join us in Glasgow next year. With our 2012 conference planned for San Francisco, we are very keen to continue building a closer relationship with our US colleagues.

Claire Hudson c.hudson@vam.ac.uk is Head of Collections Management, Theatre Museum / Victorian & Albert Theatre Collections and the current president of SIBMAS

News of Roundtable Members and Associates

For this section in *Performance!* please pass along information to let others know of your changes.

Roundtable member **George Blood** of Safe Sound Archive will be one of the presenters at the workshop on preserving audiovisual materials in Cleveland in October noted in the **News Notes** section.

Editor's Corner

Copyright Information for the Performing Arts

Perhaps your editor is the last person to find out about a useful web site on copyright maintained by the U.S. Copyright Office. The Office's web site www.copyright.gov/ includes a useful introduction to copyrights in the performing arts www.copyright.gov/register/performing.html. The reason for noting this fact here is primarily to get it on the record in this publication. If any readers have observations about its usefulness pro or con, by all means share your sentiments by sending in your comments!

The Next Issue

The Fall issue should as usual include a new **Reports from the Field** article or two and other regular features. Look for the next issue to appear in early December.

Newsletter Distribution

The method for distributing this newsletter is as a Word document sent as an attachment to an e-mail message to the subscription list maintained by the Editor. The distribution figure is more than 125 people. Following the distribution to the roundtable's membership the issue is turned into a .pdf file for placement on the roundtable's web site.

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